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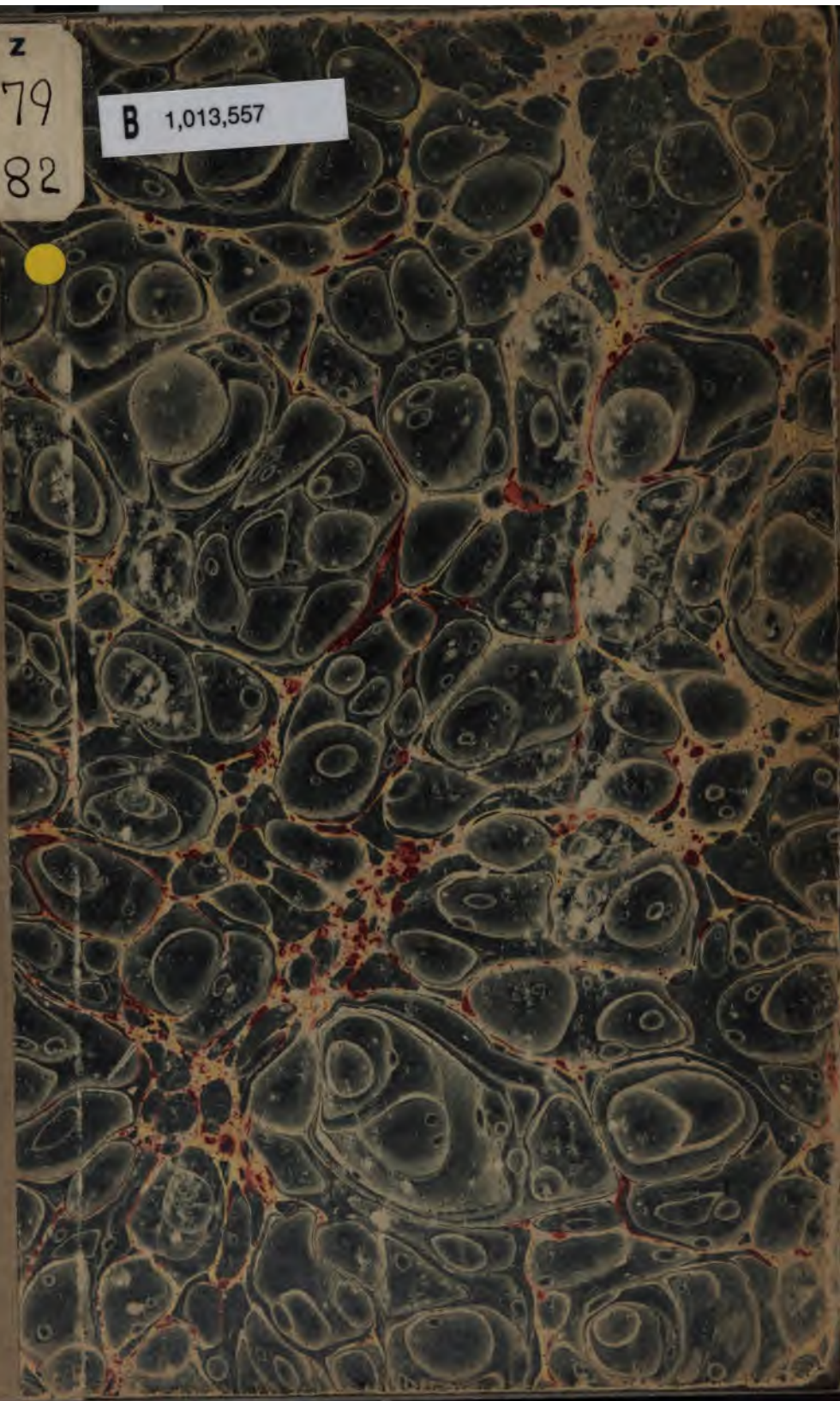
Poole—Report on the progress of Library Architecture

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American Library Association.—Cincinnati Meeting, May 24–27, 1882.

REPORT

UNIV. OF MICHIGAN

DEC 10 1913

ON THE

PROGRESS OF LIBRARY ARCHITECTURE.

BY WILLIAM F. POOLE,
Librarian of the Chicago Public Library,

AND

RESOLUTIONS OF THE ASSOCIATION

CONCERNING THE

BUILDING FOR THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

BOSTON:
SECRETARY'S OFFICE, 37 HAWLEY STREET.
1882.

REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF LIBRARY ARCHITECTURE.

BY W. F. POOLE.

Perhaps the Executive Committee assigned to me the duty of making a report on the "Progress of Library Architecture" because I am known to favor progress. At the last meeting of the Association at Washington, two papers on "Library Architecture," and the discussion which followed them, brought the subject into prominence, and elicited from the librarians present the expression of an unanimous opinion in favor of a radical reform. In one of these papers I had the honor to set forth objections to the conventional and typical style of building, and exhibited plans of construction by which these objections may be obviated. In the other paper Mr. J. L. Smithmeyer, of Washington, displayed and explained the plans which he had made, under instructions from the joint committee of Congress, for the new building of the Congress Library. In Mr. Smithmeyer's plans were embodied everything which is conventional and venerable, and everything which I had condemned.*

The resolution offered by Mr. Edmunds, of Philadelphia, expressing the opinions of the Association, and adopted by a unanimous vote, was as follows:

"Resolved, That in the opinion of the Association, the time has come for a radical modification of the prevailing typical style of library building, and the adoption of a style of construction better suited to economy and practical utility."

*The two papers named were printed in the Library Journal (v. 6. pp. 69, 77); and my paper was printed, with the drawings, by the United States Bureau of Education, for gratuitous distribution; and with the drawings in the American Architect for Sept. 17, 1881 (v. 10, p. 131).

This resolution could not be regarded as an indorsement of any specific plans which had been under discussion ; but it was a significant indication that the whole library profession is in arms against the absurd, extravagant, combustible and inconvenient library buildings which have hitherto been constructed. It will be the purpose of this report to state what progress, if any, has been made in library construction since the last meeting of this Association ; to speak of the buildings now in process of erection, and the plans on which it is proposed to erect other buildings.

A new and practical interest was imparted to the subject, when we met at Washington, from the fact that the two largest libraries in the country, the Library of Congress, and the Boston Public Library, were about to erect new buildings of a size and with requirements such as we have had no experience with. Their old buildings, which were erected less than thirty years ago, are in the conventional ecclesiastical style of the fourteenth century, and faulty in every respect. They can not be enlarged ; the books are in inaccessible galleries where they perish from heat ; readers have insufficient accommodations for study, and the administrative force of the library has no proper facilities for doing its work. Here was an opportunity for striking out into new methods of construction, and for introducing improvements, such as will not occur again in a century. If mistakes be made here they will be a barrier to future progress. The smaller libraries will copy the plans of the larger libraries ; for it is assumed—and the assumption ought to be true—that the highest intelligence and the results of the largest experience are embodied in the largest structures. It becomes, therefore, a necessary part of this report to consider what has been done, and what is doing, in maturing the plans for these new buildings.

With regard to the Library of Congress building, I addressed a note to the Librarian, Mr. Spofford, several weeks ago, stating that I had been delegated to make this report, and asking for the latest information on the subject. I have re-

ceived his reply, in which he says: "As to our building, there is no new information, save that its special day fixed by the House last month, by a decisive vote which indicates passage, has been postponed two or three times to give what they call bigger matters a chance. The interior arrangement has not been fixed (whatever the newspapers may say), but will rest with the Commission to determine. So, give us more light."

Our interest in the Library of Congress arises not simply from the fact that it is one of the two great libraries of the country, but largely from the other fact, that it is a National Library, and that our citizenship gives us a proprietary interest in it. We have, therefore, a right to meddle with its concerns, and to give our advice when we think it is needed. As individuals, and as an Association of American Librarians, there are duties which we owe to that library. We can serve it by getting the ears of the Senators and Representatives from our own States, and influencing them in its favor. As an Association, we can, by our united action, strengthen the hands of our worthy colleague, its chief executive officer, who asks for our advice and support. For the past ten years the interests of the library have been sadly neglected by Congress in not providing proper accommodations for its books and its readers. With shelving capacity for 200,000 volumes, it has now 400,000 volumes, and the surplus books are stacked up like cord-wood in the galleries and upon the floors where they are inaccessible. Nothing like order and systematic arrangement ~~are~~ possible under such circumstances. "I know nothing," says the Chairman of the joint committee of Congress on the new library building, "more humiliating to the character of Congress, or, indeed, to our National character, than the present deplorable condition of our great and invaluable library." An earnest appeal has been made every year by the Librarian for more room, and although there have been many reports on the subject and many schemes suggested, nothing as yet has been done. The delay has arisen partly from the

indifference of Congress and partly from the conflict of opinions as to the best method for obtaining the room needed. Many members of Congress have clung to the idea that the library, in its present location, could in some way be supplied with room by taking more space in the Capitol, or by throwing out wings. The unanswerable objection to all these projects is that the location itself is in a fire-trap. The Old Capitol building, in which the library is, was erected before the modern principles of fire-proof construction came into use. The roof rafters, flooring and timbers are of wood. The attic is filled with documents and papers on file; and as there are no division walls of brick, a fire would sweep from one end of the attic of the Old Capitol to the other, as it did through the Patent Office Building a few years ago. The Library of Congress has twice been burned, and it is a wonder it has not been burned a third time. The Commissioners appointed by the President, after the burning of the Patent Office, to examine the public buildings in Washington and report on their security or insecurity from fire, brought out these facts as to the insecurity of the old portion of the Capitol. It was a question in the minds of the Commission, whether, in case of fire in that building, the great dome would not fall. The Library of Congress and the Library of the Supreme Court are under that dome. (See Senate Reports, No. 753, 46th Cong. 3rd Sess. p. 25.)

Fortunately, of late, the attention of Congress has been drawn away from all the futile schemes of providing for the Library in the Capitol, and is now directed to the erection of a separate building on some outside lot. A bill to that effect is pending in Congress at this time. The location of the building has been discussed with much interest in Washington; but the questions of location and of its external features do not concern us. We are interested in the internal structure and arrangement of the building which will be erected, and their bearing upon the progress of library architecture. As our National Library, it will be a building of great cost, and, as a specimen of tasteful and appropriate architecture, should be

worthy of the noble purpose to which it will be dedicated. It will indeed be a misfortune if the venerable errors which were laid before us at the Washington meeting, as "the proposed plan;" which were eulogized as "the adopted plan" by Mr. Voorhees in his speech on the Library Bill in the Senate on March 2, and against which the whole library profession protests—are to be reproduced in this building. It is consoling to be assured by Mr. Spofford that "the interior is not fixed, but will rest with the Commission [of which he will be one], to determine," and that he appeals to us for "more light." It would be gratifying to see this assurance in the form of an amendment to the bill now before Congress. The plan which Mr. Voorhees says was "adopted by the Committee," and which "has been the subject of earnest, protracted study and investigation," and to which Mr. Spofford objects as earnestly as any other member of this Association, is a part of the bill itself. It is not easy to see why, if the bill passes in its present form, it will not carry the Committee's plans with it. Large pecuniary interests attach themselves to so important an undertaking; and it is doubtful whether the Commission, having the best intentions, could radically change the plans unless this power was specifically conferred upon them by Congress.

The objections to the Committee's plans may be stated briefly thus:

1. They will make a show building, and not one practically adapted to the uses of a library.
2. The building will be needlessly extravagant. A vast amount of space will be wasted in order to obtain what is falsely called "architectural effect." Such treatment would be proper in a large church or cathedral, but is wholly out of place in a library.
3. The arrangement for storing the books is the worst that could be devised. The alcoves are carried five stories high, one story higher than in the present Congress Library. The books are made inaccessible, and the bindings of such

books as are stored in the galleries will perish from heat. Mr. Spofford gave his experience in this matter at the Washington meeting in these words :

"If you go into the upper galleries of the Library of Congress on any day of the winter and take a book from the shelves, the chances are that it will almost burn your hand. It has occurred to me that if these warped and shriveled and overheated volumes were not inanimate beings—if they could only speak—they would cry out to their custodians: 'Our sufferings are intolerable.' In the library I speak of, moreover, there is only the injury resulting from the rising heat to which the books are subjected, since no gas is burned. When to the fearful and almost incandescent heat that gathers under every ceiling, is added the well-known destructive influence of coal gas burned through many hours of each day, the effects upon the books and bindings are simply deplorable."

Mr. Spofford here speaks only of the heat in winter. The effect of summer heat on the bindings of books stored in galleries is even more deplorable. The blazing sun of a Washington summer, pouring down through the skylights of the roof of the structure planned by Mr. Smithmeyer, will raise the temperature to a height far in excess of that caused by artificial heat in winter. Mr. Dyer, of the St. Louis Mercantile Library, says the temperature of his upper gallery frequently rises in summer (and he has no skylights) to 140 degrees. It is folly and madness to place books under such conditions that their bindings are sure to be destroyed by excessive heat.

It seems unnecessary to speak of other features in the plans adopted by the joint committee of Congress, which are as faulty as those which have been named. Mr. Voorhees in his elaborate speech of March 2, stated that the adopted plans were carefully examined by the principal librarians of the country, who attended the meeting of the American Library Association, at Washington, in February, 1881; that the committee had the benefit of their experience and observation, and that the plans were warmly approved. Mr. Voorhees has been

strangely misinformed as to the opinions and the proceedings of this Association.

The Library bill has not yet come to a general discussion in the Senate and House; and if it should be so amended as to refer all questions relating to plans to the three commissioners, with full power to act, and with the authority to consult with expert librarians, no reasonable objection can be raised to the bill. In its present form it is likely to meet with opposition from the best friends of the Congress Library and the library interests of the country.

A senseless opposition to the appropriation of public money for the expansion of an institution which is likely to become a National Library, must be expected, and can do little harm. Already the Washington correspondents of several metropolitan newspapers, whose appreciation ^{of} literature is limited to the "Turf Register" and "Stud Book," are turning their oracular wisdom into this channel. They tell us that the Library of Congress is becoming an ambitious and dangerous institution; that the Librarian is now helping members prepare their speeches, and soon he will write them; that he is a power behind the throne greater than the throne, and can carry any measure he sets his heart upon; that the library building scheme is an ambitious project to promote his own political importance, and that he will soon demand a seat in the Cabinet. They tell us that the copyright literature of the country which by law is deposited in the Library, is trash; and that the proper disposition to make of these books is to build or hire a cheap store-house, and pack them away like so many red-herring. They need not to be catalogued or placed on shelves, for nobody will ever ask to see them. This is a cheerful view of American literature. The estimate is so absurd it needs no comment, for it carries its refutation upon its face.

The service which the Library of Congress is doing in the registration, cataloguing and preservation of the copyright publications of the country, alone justifies the expense of erecting a new building for its accommodation. It is the Census

Bureau of our national literature. Its functions ought to include the registration and preservation of every book and pamphlet, publicly and privately issued in the country, whether copyrighted or not. No institution, except it be under the auspices of the Government, could do this. The registration of a new book is as important as the registration of a new baby. It matters not whether it be a large book or a small book, a good book or a poor book, a book with covers or a book without covers. It is enough for the purpose of registration and for preservation in a national library, that it is a book. Every little picaninny in the South, even if it be hump-backed and have the rickets, is registered by the patient census-taker—the name written out in full, with age, nativity and social condition, and with as much pains as if he were a millionaire, had stolen a railroad, or was owner of a trotting mare with a record of 2.10 $\frac{1}{4}$. Can not the Government do as much for a book? We can make no reasonable guess as to which of the books and pamphlets of our day will be rare and priceless two hundred years hence; but of this we may rest assured—they will be publications which we now regard as trifles or trash.

As we all have a deep interest in the welfare of the Library of Congress; as the present is an important crisis in its history, and as our colleague, the accomplished Librarian, can not be present and speak to us in its behalf, this report has treated its affairs more freely than would otherwise have been deemed necessary.

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

On the 22d of April, 1880, the State of Massachusetts gave to the city of Boston a lot of land on the corner of Boylston and Dartmouth streets, measuring thirty-two thousand five hundred square feet, for the erection of a new Public Library building, and with the condition that the city should begin to build within three years. As the trustees for ten years had been complaining of their old building, and when they submitted

their annual report in June last, had under consideration, for more than a year, the new enterprise, it was expected that the report would throw some light on the matter of library construction. This expectation was not realized. If the trustees had any views as to plans of construction, they were carefully concealed. The only passage in the report bearing on the subject was the following, the meaning of which is obscure : " No elegant edifice is to be designed in which the books are to be deposited in conformity to the architectural or ornamental structure of the building ; but it should be erected over the books, the arrangement and classification of which for convenience of use must determine the form and details of its great hall, in which they must necessarily be stored, and thus outline the walls of the building. The other conditions of the Library can be easily fashioned to conform to this first necessity."

If this means that the new building will have "its great hall in which they (the books) must necessarily be stored," which the trustees regard as "this first necessity," it is a repetition of the plan of the old building which they have so persistently and eloquently condemned, and at last propose to abandon.

In order to obtain the latest information, I addressed a letter of inquiry to Judge Chamberlain, the Librarian, and I will give the following extract from his reply, dated April 8 :

" We have done absolutely nothing in respect to the plan of the new library building. Mr Greenough [the president of the trustees] was abroad last summer, and looked at many buildings, both in England and on the Continent ; and the same may be said of the city architect, Mr. Clough. A year ago the trustees passed a vote recommending that the City Council should authorize the city architect, in consultation with the trustees, to prepare plans for the construction of a fire-proof building. As yet there has been no conference that I am aware of between the architect and the trustees. In fact, the trustees have had all they wanted to do in securing the requisite land."

Judge Chamberlain having described the lot given by the State, says that the trustees are unwilling to build on so small a lot, which is equivalent to a lot 250x130 feet. They desire to buy an adjoining lot of equal size, giving them 65,000 square feet—a lot 25,000 square feet, or $62\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. larger than the one on which I proposed in my paper on "Library Construction," to erect a building with a capacity of three million volumes. The Legislature has authorized the City to condemn the adjacent property; but the City Council has not yet voted the money to pay for it. In the meanwhile the proposition has been considered of taking the new High School property, on Montgomery street, for the Library; and no practical results have been reached. Judge Chamberlain closes by saying that he will look with interest for the views of the Association on the subject of library architecture expressed at this meeting.

MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

The University of Michigan is erecting a very tasteful library building from plans made in Boston. The reading-room is semi-circular in front, with a radius of forty feet, and has a depth of about sixty feet. The necessary rooms are numerous and convenient. The Harvard Library stack plan is adopted for the storage of books, and will shelve one hundred thousand volumes. The Harvard plan is modified in several particulars. The cases are placed three feet apart, instead of two feet four inches; the stack has a central passageway, and three, instead of six galleries, or floors,—all of which changes are improvements. The first floor is of stone, and the second and third floors of hammered glass, except the passageways, which are of stone. The height of stories is seven feet six inches. The building which incloses the stack is in its exterior measure 55.6 by 43.4 feet. A passageway three feet six inches wide surrounds the stack. Mr. Winsor is the advocate and defender of the stack system; and as I am not its patron, I shall leave him, in the general discussion which is to follow, to explain its merits.

THE ENOCH PRATT LIBRARY.

Mr. Enoch Pratt has presented to the city of Baltimore a large sum of money, for the purpose of founding a free public library for the circulation of popular books, provided the city will accept the gift and administer it as a public trust. It is intended to supplement the work of the Peabody Institute Library, which is solely a library of reference. Mr. Pratt, like Mr. George Peabody, the city's earlier benefactor, is a native of Massachusetts, and in business has made his fortune in Baltimore. Without waiting for the city to accept the gift, Mr. Pratt has gone about the erection of a building on his own land. His lot has a frontage of 81 feet on Mulberry street, and a depth of 140 feet to a 20-foot alley. As the lot has no light of its own except on the front and rear, in order to get light into the middle portion of the building, it was necessary to draw in the walls twenty feet on each side, giving the building a width of only thirty-seven feet. The only peculiar feature of the structure is that the first story of the middle portion, thirty-seven by seventy-five feet, and eighteen feet high, is to be used for the storage of books. Two stories are made of this room, each nine feet high, which are connected by stairs and lifts. The architect estimates that these two stories will shelve one hundred and fifty thousand volumes, which in practice, I think, will be found an over estimate. Above the book room is a reading room of the same size, and twenty-five feet high. Connected with it, on the Mulberry street front, is a book room thirty feet square, divided as before into two stories, each nine feet high, and which, it is supposed, will contain fifty thousand volumes.

There seems to be little in the general plan of this building to be commended, and nothing worthy of being copied. The lot is inappropriate. The building should have been placed on a corner lot, where the light would be ample. The light portions of the building are devoted to directors' room, offices janitor's quarters and packing room, and the darkest portions

